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INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1270
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4809
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8358
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5920
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1646
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1742
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 000471

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO
PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#) [EAID](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: STRUGGLES AT THE TOP AFFECTING RELIEF EFFORT

REF: A. RANGOON 468 B. RANGOON 448 C. RANGOON 400 D. RANGOON 337

Classified By: P/E Chief Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) Pol/econ chief met with the well-connected journalist and leader of the local NGO Myanmar Egress, Nay Win Maung, who described the latest state-of-play regarding the senior generals' management of the Cyclone Nargis relief effort, emerging factions among the generals stemming from disagreement on how relief efforts are being handled, and speculation over Senior General Than Shwe's plans for the future. A hard-line faction within the senior leadership, led by Vice Senior General Maung Aye, is pushing to roll back agreements the GOB made with ASEAN and the UN on access for international staff to the Delta. On June 10, the regime announced new and cumbersome access and coordination procedures for the UN and INGOs conducting relief work in the affected areas. The UN and ASEAN view the new procedures as "unacceptable," and are determining how best to push back.
End summary.

¶2. (C) Nay Win Maung said that Vice Senior General Maung Aye and Secretary-1 Tin Aung Myint Oo held a meeting in Rangoon on June 3 for the ministers from the National Disaster Committee and the various crony businessmen assigned to "reconstruct" the Delta (Refs C and D). During the meeting, Maung Aye reportedly went on a tirade regarding "American warships in the Delta" and claimed that after a Chinese appeal to the U.S. had failed to remove them, the Russians had threatened to send three of their own ships in response. Only then did the U.S. agree to move its ship, Maung Aye implied.

¶3. (C) On Saturday, June 7, Maung Aye reportedly met with the regime's top crony, Tay Za, and told him the government calculated that approximately 300,000 people had perished in the cyclone, but that this number would be released to the public "over his dead body." Nay Win Maung said he obtained this information from Tay Za's older brother, whom he claims to be close to.

¶4. (C) Nay Win Maung said the horrific images of cyclone damage, death, and survivors that were circulating on the internet, in the international media, and on VCD throughout Burma, were embarrassing the generals. As a result, he said that Maung Aye had ordered access to the Delta for international staff to be tightened, and predicted we would

see evidence of this soon. Indeed, at a June 10 meeting with the UN, INGOs, and the NGOs, the Minister of Planning announced more cumbersome travel permission requirements and access procedures than had been discussed and agreed upon at the TCG meetings (Refs A and B).

¶15. (C) The new procedures require the UN, INGOs, and NGOs to submit a proposed work program to the TCG and the "focal ministry" for approval; receive approval for visas through the TCG and the focal ministry; submit a detailed list of relief supplies to be provided, including their quantity and value; inform where supplies are stored in Yangon; submit plans for township-wide distribution with permission from the focal ministry to the local Township Coordinating Committees; coordinate distribution with respective Township Coordinating Committees; receive in-country travel approvals from focal ministries; and notify Township Coordinating Committees on arrival and departure from their respective areas. Acting UN Humanitarian Assistance Coordinator Dan Baker told us the UN and ASEAN view the new procedures as "unacceptable." He said UN Headquarters was preparing to intervene, but had not yet decided how.

¶16. (C) Nay Win Maung described the machinations at senior levels in the regime over international involvement in Cyclone Nargis relief as "more complicated than we could imagine." He believed factions were beginning to form among the senior generals based on those with a more flexible approach toward international assistance, such as third-ranking general Thura Shwe Mann, Prime Minister Thein Sein, and Minister of Agriculture Htay Oo; and a hard-line faction led by Maung Aye and Secretary-1 Tin Aung Myint Oo, who were bent on closely controlling the activities of foreigners in Burma. The hard-liners were becoming more aggressive, he explained, because they were afraid of having their incompetent response to Cyclone Nargis revealed.

¶17. (C) Also, a change in the power dynamic had emerged in the Delta, according to Nay Win Maung. The ministers responsible for their respective areas had no funding, and little relief supplies to dole out. The UN and INGOs were flush with supplies and able to distribute them. As a result, power and influence had perceptibly shifted from the penniless ministers and local government officials, to the organizations with money that could meet the needs of the villagers. This dynamic is not lost on the Army, Nay Win Maung, emphasized.

¶18. (C) Asked about the role of regional commanders in the relief effort, Nay Win Maung said they had little role other than maintaining civil order and following orders given from Nay Pyi Taw, such as coordinating the movement of victims. The Prime Minister was making key decisions on the relief efforts, assisted by the powerful USDA chairman and Minister of Agriculture Htay Oo, who he revealed had been put in charge of overall relief efforts in the Delta. Nay Win Maung said it was Prime Minister Thein Sein who had appealed directly to Than Shwe to secure the Senior General's permission to allow international and humanitarian staff to travel to the affected areas. Nay Win Maung described both Thein Sein and Htay Oo as smart, pragmatic, and flexible.

¶19. (C) Secretary-1, Tin Aung Myint Oo, was emerging as a hard-liner. Although he had a good relationship with Maung Aye, he was still loyal to Than Shwe, Nay Win Maung stressed. Secretary-1 behaved like a "cowboy" he asserted, but he had a lot of power and knew how to play the game. Than Shwe promoted Tin Aung Myint Oo to his current position to counter the more "lenient and flexible" Thura Shwe Mann, Nay Win Maung said. He then replaced Maung Aye with Tin Aung Myint Oo as head of the powerful Trade Council, to provide conflict between the two hard-liners and assure they did not align against him. This was how Than Shwe cultivated loyalty and achieved a balance of power in his inner circle, Nay Win Maung explained. Maung Aye felt marginalized since being removed from the Trade Council and had begun to annoy Than Shwe by posturing as more hard-line than even the Senior General, speculated Nay Win Maung.

¶10. (C) Nay Win Maung said that if Than Shwe were not in good enough health to be President in 2010, he would give the job to Thura Shwe Mann, who was not only the preferred choice of Than Shwe, but also the Senior General's powerful wife, Daw Kyaing Kyaing. Nay Win Maung continued that Than Shwe planned to appoint Tin Aung Myint Oo as head of the Military to counter-balance Thura Shwe Mann's power, and would appoint Agriculture Minister Htay Oo as one vice president, and the leader of the Union Pa-O National Organization, Aung Kham Htee, as the second vice president to appease the ethnic cease-fire groups. Out of all the ethnic cease-fire group leaders, Aung Kham Htee had the best relationship with the regime, Nay Win Maung reported.

¶11. (C) With such a lineup, the West could eventually expect some liberalization of the economy and the political situation, but nothing radical would ever happen while Than Shwe and Maung Aye were alive, Nay Win Maung believed. As long as they controlled the access to economic spoils, no one would challenge their authority and their wishes.

¶12. (C) Comment: The unprecedented devastation caused by Cyclone Nargis succeeded in doing what no other situation has done before: uniting the West and Burma's Asian neighbors to bring unprecedented pressure on the regime to open up and allow international humanitarian workers unfettered access. This pressure has gradually produced results, but is still being resisted by regime hard-liners who likely recognize the potential threat to their continued grip on power if the international community succeeds in establishing an impartial support network that genuinely responds to the victim's needs, rather than the regime's. The announcement of cumbersome procedures is little more than a reiteration of the regime's 2006 guidelines, which have been widely ignored by the UN and INGOs. The announcement at this time does reveal the differences among the senior generals on how to proceed. There are powerful figures on both sides of this debate, which means that donors will continue to encounter obstacles as they try to get assistance to those in need. By maintaining a unified position and insisting on better access, the UN, ASEAN, and NGOs have so far succeeded. The debate among the generals helps explain why it is taking so long. End comment.

VILLAROSA